

# Touchpoints of Infant, Toddler, Preschool Development: Foundations for Strong Communities: PART I

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A civilization's *strength* is measured by the care  
and wellbeing of its most *vulnerable*:  
the young, old, sick and disabled

*-n'a a tui a po po ga*

# What is Touchpoints?

- A developmental phenomenon
- A way of thinking/being – doing/saying
- An approach to working with families in health, early education and care, early intervention and social service settings
- An approach to professional development: changing systems of care to support change in individual practice
- A national site network – learning community
- A Boston-based center

# What is Touchpoints?

- “A low cost, low tech, resource-sparing, pediatric public health intervention to save the lives of those babies dying from malnutrition who are not brought to care, or brought to late because their parents have been made to feel blamed and ashamed by their doctors and hospitals.”

*Luis Moya Barquin, MD President*

*Guatemala Association of Pediatrics*

# Why Touchpoints?

## Needs addressed

- **Reaffirm parents' expertise**
- **Rehumanize healthcare**
- **Transform childcare into family care**
- **Shift social service from child 'rescuing' to family strengthening**

# Why Touchpoints?- Needs addressed (con.)

- **Refocus human service workers on needs, strengths, problems, solutions *as defined* by those they serve**
- **Break down barriers between service providers that fragment care**
- **Resynchronize professional cultures through reflective practice with cultures of those they serve**
- **Rededicate professionals to their mission**

# Key elements

- **Developmental**
- **Preventive**
- **Relational**
- **Strengths-based  
(empowerment/  
self-advocacy)**
- **Systems-theory**
- **Culturally  
informed**
- **Reflective  
practice**
- **Evidence-based**



# Developmental: Questioning Unquestioned Assumptions

- **One developmental phase follows another.**
- **But why does one stop and one start?  
How?**
- **And what happens to a phase when it's over?**
- **How can we optimize development if we don't understand the mechanism of change?**

# Touchpoints: A Developmental Framework

Development unfolds in  
**regressions,**  
**bursts,**  
**and pauses.**

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# Chimp infant/mother interactions :

## TP-like process of development

- **Predictable transitional periods alternate with stable periods**
- **Regression: baby chimp more demanding, regresses, clingy, stays closer to mother**
- **Conflict: mother pushes baby –to discover new potential for greater independence but unlike human mother, does not call pediatrician**

# Touchpoints: Developmental Crises

- Predictable Stress
- Predictable Conflict-within child, child-parent, among adults

*FOSTER Vulnerability as opportunity for*

- Learning
- Relationship

*PREVENT Vulnerability to*

- Parental sense of failure, incompetence, ineffectiveness
- Abuse

# Momentos Claves

## Guia Preventiva:

### Prevencion del maltrato de los niños

- Inquieto, gritando al fin de cada dia  
3 – 12 semanas
- Disciplina  
9 meses
- Pataletas  
12-36 meses
- Adios las pañales  
24 meses...

(prevencion de la violencia domestica?)

# Touchpoints Model of Development and Anticipatory Guidance

- Anticipation of 'normative' developmental regressions and improved understanding of child behavior prevents misguided reactions contributing to developmental derailment and child abuse
- Increased trust leads to increased self-referral and earlier identification of developmental delays, parental mental health problems, etc.

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WHAT DOES  
PROPEL  
DEVELOPMENT  
FORWARD,  
ACTUALLY?

How do  
children grow,  
develop, and  
learn?

# Children Learn Through Relationships

**Processes that require relationships:**

- **Attachment**
- **Self Regulation**
- **Mutual Regulation**
- **Shared Subjectivity**

**Processes that require emotional availability  
of child, parent, teacher**

# What is emotional availability?

The capacity of two humans  
(infant and parent,

child and teacher)

to be authentically present in  
the moment

# EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY

Learning to understand a child, to understand one's self as a parent or caregiver requires

**emotional availability**

**Children** can only shape their caregiving environment if they and caregivers are **emotionally available** to each other

# What hinders emotional availability?

- Isolation
- Sense of powerlessness, disenfranchisement
- Overwhelming stress
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Threatened survival

# Historical Trauma From One Generation to the Next

- Prenatal exposure to poverty, stress, substances, environmental toxins
- Parental depression, PTSD, emotional dysregulation and unavailability, fear, guilt, shame
- Internalized oppression, child abuse, domestic violence
- Disconnection from the historical past – the source of cultural identity
- Paralysis of the capacity to invest emotionally in one's child, to envision the future with hope

# Emotional availability comes from

- the support of a **web of relationships** that gives them the strength to learn from and face their mistakes
- the **hope for their child's development**, their future as a family, hope for the world



# What supports emotional availability?

- An underlying sense of security – about one's self, and the relationship with the other
- A sense of connection to other supportive relationships
- Basic protection for survival

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How do parents  
learn to become  
*their* children's  
parents?

# The Baby's Behavior can be the Parent's Guide



Parents are the  
experts on their child  
because with close  
observation, the child  
will teach the parent.

# CHILDREN SHOW PARENTS HOW TO BE *THEIR* PARENTS

- From parents' close and sensitive **observation** of their baby's behavior: babies shape their caregiving environment
- From the **crises of development-Touchpoints**
- From their mistakes, through **trial and error**

# **Where does parents' expertise come from?**

- The emotional availability to carefully observe the baby's behavior**
- Their own past experience of being nurtured as babies themselves**

# Parents' Sense of Competence and Effectiveness

Parents can face their 'mistakes' to learn from them if they have an overall **sense of competence**

Parents can invest in trying to influence their child's future if they have an overall sense of their **ability to influence their own lives**

How do parents  
learn to  
become  
parents?



# Parenting practices come from

- Family traditions
- childhood experience of being parented
- vision of the future world for which a child must be prepared
- cultural identity

# Summary:

## Strengths for parents and caregivers

- Emotional availability
- Sense of competence as a parent
- Sense of efficacy as a parent
- Social connectedness
- Empowerment
- Hope for the future

# Parents learn from relationships, not information alone

- Babies don't come with instruction manuals; Don't parents just need education and information to be better parents?
- Beyond child development to parent development: understanding the experience and meaning of child developmental regressions and progressions to parents.
- Strategy: Use the child's behavior as your language to make your relationship with the family.

# Learning in relationships – with children, with families

Not teaching,

not just information

but shared

observation and discovery,

shared meaning making

# The 3 Year Old Journey

## Parent Group

- What every parent knows  
about their 3 year old
- What every 3 year old knows  
about their parents
- Learning through play?  
“Yeah, right.  
Our kids don’t have time for that”

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- Children only develop and thrive in the context of relationships.
- Emotional availability of parent and child is critical to the fundamental processes of child development. But this depends on a wealth of supportive relationships to family, friends, and community.

# “Teach your children...

what we have taught our children: that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. This we know. All things are connected, like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, We do to ourselves.”

Chief Seattle



***A human being is a part of the whole called by us [the] universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. -- Albert Einstein***

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